

The Messenger

Volume 2012

Issue 1 *The Messenger, Spring 2012*

Article 6

Spring 2012

The BEAR I Didn't See

Denise Parker

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarship.richmond.edu/messenger>



Part of the [Fiction Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Parker, Denise (2012) "The BEAR I Didn't See," *The Messenger*: Vol. 2012: Iss. 1, Article 6.

Available at: <http://scholarship.richmond.edu/messenger/vol2012/iss1/6>

This Fiction is brought to you for free and open access by UR Scholarship Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Messenger by an authorized administrator of UR Scholarship Repository. For more information, please contact scholarshiprepository@richmond.edu.

The **BEAR** I Didn't See *By Denise Parker*

We'd seen it earlier that day, or evidence of it, all of us crowded into my uncle's camper, peering excitedly at the screen. The hidden camera had snapped a few images of a bear, so from the comfort of an awkwardly orange couch we appraised it via thumbnails. "It doesn't look so big," my dad asserted, while my aunt looked nervous. Phil was running his fingers over the camera's casing, which had been decorated with new ridges, claw marks scraping down it like riverbeds. I glanced out the window bravely.

Later that night we had a bonfire, the three of us lounging in uncomfortable chairs, burning our fingers on marshmallows and banishing the night. I sat with my back to the building; there on the ridge surrounded by trees my bravery had faded and every crackle of twigs sounded to me like something crashing through the mountain directly at me. I pulled my smoky sweater closer to my face and forced myself to watch the flames. My dad and uncle drank their beers and talked about their plans to clear a patch and build a real house. I told them I'd help clear trees, when I really meant I'd sit in the shade and read a book. Thoughts of warm sunlight made the blackness fade to greyness in my sight and I joined the conversation to keep it that way, avoiding the unseen bear lurking at the edges of my mind. I began to get comfortable in the familiar softness of night, ignoring the threat that had invaded my favourite time of day.

When night had faded into a properly inky, thick darkness they rose and announced that it was time for an adventure. We'd walked that way before, but now it was dark and so everything was new. I clutched my flashlight and was torn where to point it. It didn't take long for me to decide that tripping over shadowed roots was preferable to not seeing my doom lumbering toward me through the trees, not seeing the light reflect off the beady black eyes that were sure to seek me out as soon as we stepped foot on the trail. The moment I'd made up my mind they told me to turn off the light; they wanted to wholly experience the dimness.

I was blindfolded, the night wrapping itself across my face. For a moment it was tangible and I couldn't even breathe. As the air came in short small gulps I heard little crunching, crashing sounds, envisioned a raging demon, silky furred, teeth bared, breaking down trees a few feet from me. I reached out and touched my dad, human contact settling me back down to the earth for a moment. Then I heard it again, and I was sure it was real this time. A substantial stomping from up the mountain, sounds of something large and living and deadly brown delighting in having found a helpless girl-morsel for dinner, not even armed with her flashlight.

Then silence fell and my mind began to race, working overtime as I realised that worse than the noise of a clumsy animal was the silence and stealth of an agile, careful black bear. I wouldn't even hear it sneak up behind me, wouldn't know what was happening until I felt the paw smack into me, the claws sink into my laughably soft flesh. I began to whimper, and they chuckled, telling me to breathe and that I was okay. But it got closer, I stepped back and stumbled on a shadow, squeaking aloud, a wordless cry for help.

It was only then that they relented, flicking the light on and leading me back to camp. I glanced behind me the whole way, eyes scanning the beaten path for the bear whose breath I surely felt on my neck. It seemed like hours before we reached the clearing again and I let out the breath I'd been holding, relaxed my white-knuckled grip on the flashlight. The fire still burned and within its circle of light I slowly came back to myself. I was whole, unsliced, unmauled, uneaten. The building still stood, free of claw mark decorations. There were no paw prints to be seen in the soft earth. I laughed weakly against my fear, made myself wander a bit, but even then at the back of everything was the fear of the bear that I didn't see.